

LGBTQ+ History

in the archives at Warwickshire
County Record Office



Information Leaflet

Image reference:
WCRO CR114A/882

What are Archives?

Archives like the Warwickshire County Record Office are places where the records of human history are stored and preserved for generations to come. They are also places that are **freely accessible to anyone** – you do not need to be an academic or a researcher to visit and view the historic documents held here.

If you are interested in visiting us check out our contact details on the back page and visit our website for opening hours

Archives hold the sources for our collective memory and they shape how we understand ourselves as a society. They try to ensure that our whole diverse history is represented as best as possible.

LGBTQ+ History – ‘Hidden Histories’?

LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other minority gender/sexual identities.

It can be tricky to find records which represent the LGBTQ+ community. Someone once said that 'the most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.' Sometimes records of our past do not survive and sometimes they are never created. In this way, voices can get lost. These include records of LGBTQ+ lives, which are often called '**hidden histories**'.

However, some records do survive, they have just been difficult to find. Opposite you will find some of the records for LGBTQ+ history we have located at our archive.

LGBTQ+ history is not niche or specialist. It is human history, history for everyone, so everyone ought to be able to access it. By taking steps to preserve these stories and make them visible, we can enrich our understanding of the past and benefit future generations.

Sources for LGBTQ+ History at Warwickshire County Record Office

Records of The Other Branch Bookshop (reference CR3541) – an alternative/radical bookshop in Leamington in 1970s and 1980s, which stocked books and magazines relating to gay rights, feminism and the civil rights movement. The Day Books contain notes from the volunteer staff and provide an insight into their activism.

Personal papers – These kinds of documents (letters, diaries, sketchbooks, photo albums, etc.) can give an insight into the personal lives of individuals and may reveal attitudes and experiences relevant to LGBTQ+ research. For example, we hold the sketchbook of George Francis Alexander Seymour, 7th Marquess of Hertford and owner of Ragley Hall (reference CR114A/882), who held male-only parties and performed 'skirt dances' in sequined butterfly wings.

Calendar of Prisoners – a list of individuals held in the county prisons for trial at the Courts of Assize and at the Quarter Sessions held in Warwick between 1800 and 1900. This includes cases of men tried for homosexual activity.

Newspapers – The Record Office holds back files of the main Warwick and Leamington Spa papers, and some other local papers. These are likely to contain reports of events relating to LGBTQ+ individuals.

Central Hospital, Hatton – In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, homosexuality (lesbianism in particular) was considered in terms of mental illness. There may be relevant items in the records of the Central Hospital, Hatton (an asylum which opened in 1852 and closed in 1995). We have not located any such individuals, but a great deal has not yet been searched. As these records are of a sensitive nature, there may be restrictions to access. If you contact us, we can advise.

LGBTQ+ Resource Pack – available in the local studies area, our resource pack is a good starting point when looking for records held here. It includes lists of references to gender non-conformity and male homosexuality/bisexuality in the Warwickshire newspapers, cases of sodomy in the Warwickshire court records, and articles relating to some LGBTQ+ individuals in Warwickshire.

How You Can Help

This is where you come in! Here are some ways you can get involved:

- **Keep us informed:** If you find more sources or stories of LGBTQ+ history in Warwickshire, particularly in documents which you've found here, feel free to contact us and we can add them to our Resource Pack and highlight them to the wider public.
- **Deposit and preserve more records:** We need to make sure we are finding and preserving the records of LGBTQ+ groups today. If you have been part of an LGBTQ+ community or activist group, or if you have personal archives relating to life as an LGBTQ+ individual in Warwickshire, we would be interested to hear from you. Get in touch using our contact details below and we can discuss whether the items are suitable for permanent preservation.
- **Read, write and share articles with 'Our Warwickshire':** We have an amazing space for individuals and communities to share their own stories in their own words – it's called *Our Warwickshire*. It is a heritage sharing website which anyone can contribute to. There is a section dedicated to LGBTQ+ history and it would be great to see more histories added to the site. Just go to the website and click 'Get Involved': www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk

How could your stories help future generations understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ people today?

Contact

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